



**DEFINING &
DEFENDING
a NEW CHURCH'S
THEOLOGICAL
STANCE**



Think it over...

If you were entering a new mission field, how would you set up the theological grid for the ministry? Check whatever element(s) you think today would be the wise approach...

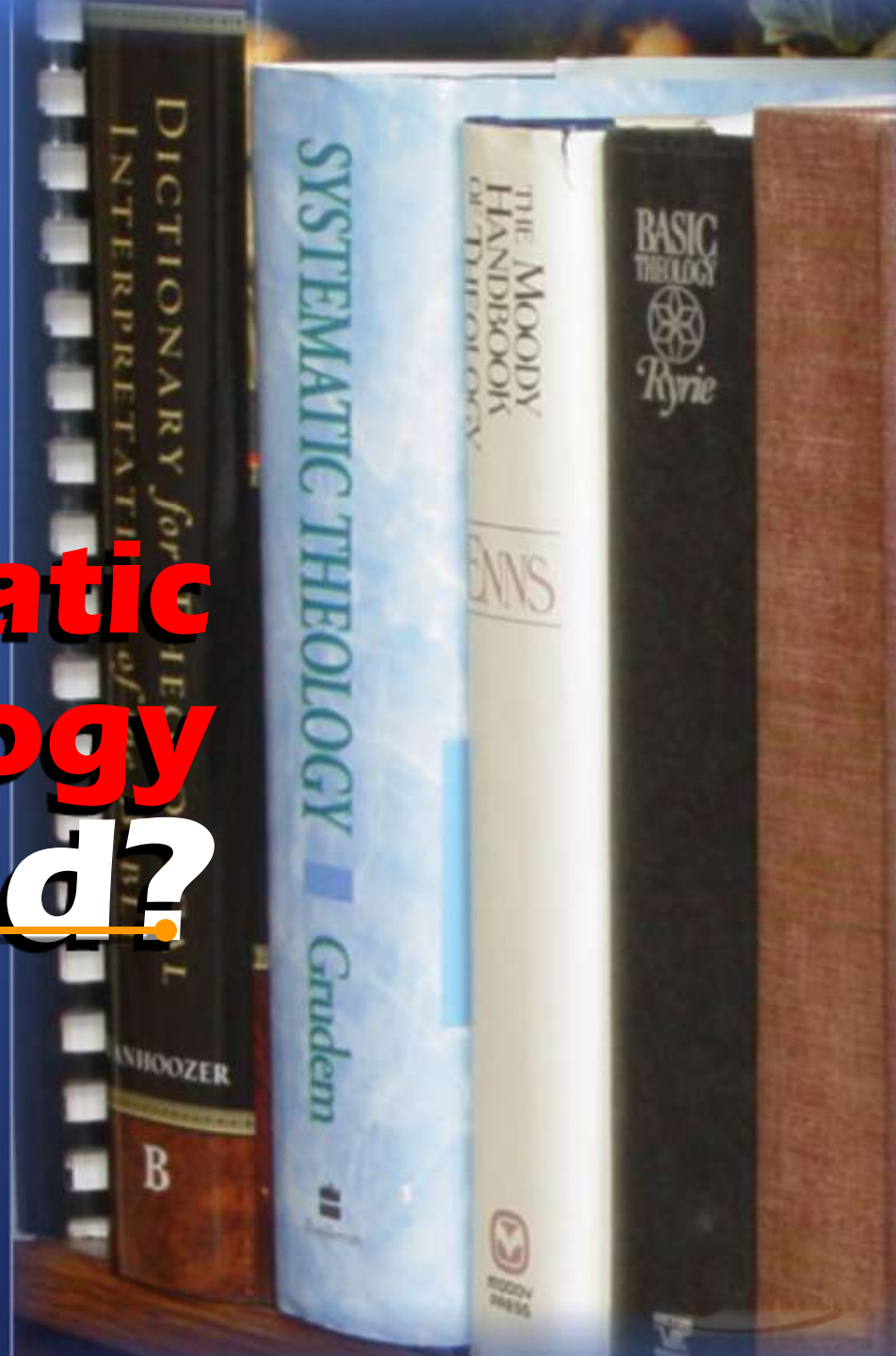
- Vote among new believers about whether to have a doctrinal statement;
- Impose the doctrinal statement of your mission board, no questions asked;
- Teach your own convictions to key leaders and entrust them with the task of making the decision about whether or not to follow your preferred doctrinal grid;
- Avoid going beyond the Nicene creed (AD 325) in your doctrinal position;
- Adopt the national evangelical groups' doctrinal framework so as not to be narrower than the majority of believers in the country;
- Other _____

**Your response
says a lot
about how you think
about
Truth,
Authority
and
Discipleship**



DEFINING A NEW CHURCH'S THEOLOGICAL POSITION

1. Is systematic theology valid?

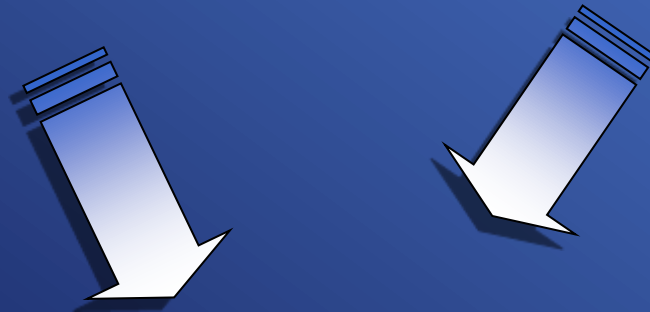


Criticisms of systematic theology as a discipline

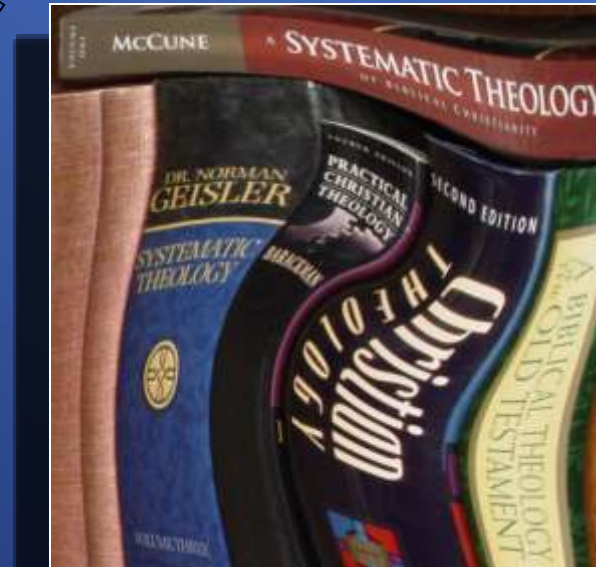
- **Postmodern scepticism**

No metanarratives are valid

Baconian scientific method is invalid



Therefore systematic theology is invalid

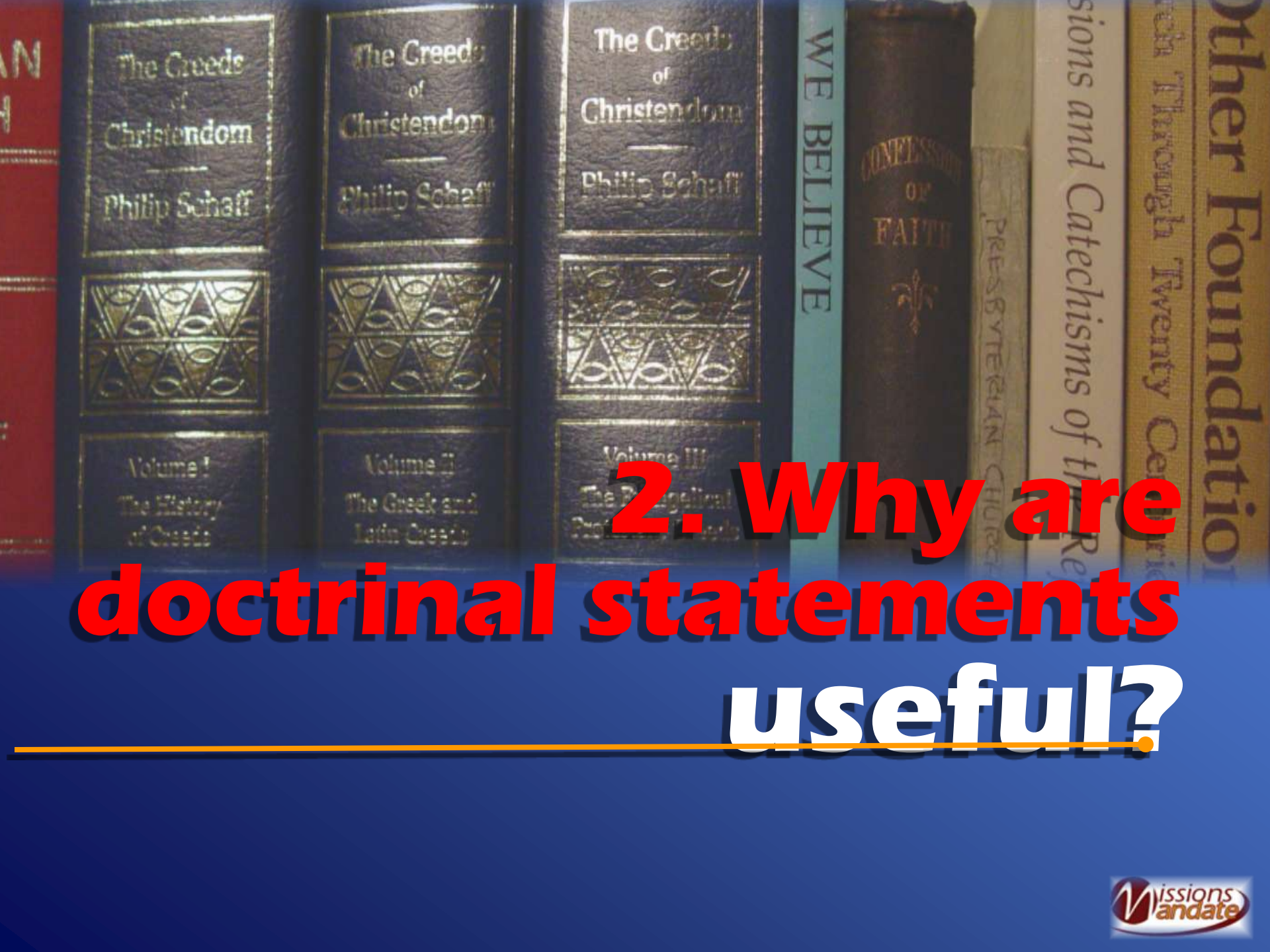


**But systematic theology is valid...
because New Testament writers
themselves give the example of simple
doctrinal summaries**

- Luke 24.27
- Acts 2-3
- Acts 8.36-38
- The Book of Romans
- 1 Corinthians 2.1-2
- 1 Corinthians 15.1-5
- Philippians 2.6-11
- 1 Timothy 3.15-17
- Hebrews 5.11-6.2
- 1 John 2.7, 24
- 1 John 4.2

**But systematic theology is valid...
because the apostles referred to a
Body of Truth that could be identified,
believed, retained and defended.**

- Matthew 28.19-20:
Jesus commanded disciples be taught to obey all He taught;
- Romans 6.17:
Believers were committed to a “form of teaching;”
- 2 Thessalonians 2.15:
Apostolic traditions were taught orally or by letter;
- 2 Timothy 1.13-14:
Through the power of the Holy Spirit Timothy must retain the standard of sound words entrusted to him by Paul as a “sacred deposit;”
- 2 Timothy 2.2:
Timothy must teach all the truth heard from Paul to trustworthy men who will be able to teach others also.



2. Why are doctrinal statements useful?

Usefulness of doctrinal statements:

- They clarify truth in the face of heresies;
- They must not replace biblical authority;
- They define publicly where a church stands in relation to debated issues;
- They fulfill the spirit of 1 Corinthians 14:40;
- They imitate Jesus' example in John 18:20.



3. Are some doctrines more important than others?

Deciding about what to put in and what to leave out...

- Recognize a hierarchy of truths in Scripture (Matthew 23.23, the weightier provisions of the Law)
- Recognize the organic inter-relatedness of all doctrine. Error in one area spreads to others like a virus.
- Recognize that Jesus taught the importance of all the details (Matthew 5.18-19; Paul in Acts 20.20,27)

Deciding about what to put in and what to leave out...

Answer several practical questions about the rationale for putting some things in and leaving other things out of a doctrinal statement:

- What issues must be addressed to preserve the new church from doctrinal disease?
- How will the doctrinal statement be used: to define membership? eldership? the church's public stance on issues?
- What are the big controversies in the culture already?
- How often do you intend to update and clarify the statement?



4. How do you teach and implement a theological position?

Defending a new church's theological stance by teaching

- Teach the doctrinal statement's content to your elders and key leaders, and explain why these items are important;
- Make systematic doctrinal teaching a part of the ongoing discipleship process;
- Emphasize the importance of doctrine in expository preaching;
- Explain the implications of abandoning loyalty to God's truth.

Implementing a new church's theological stance

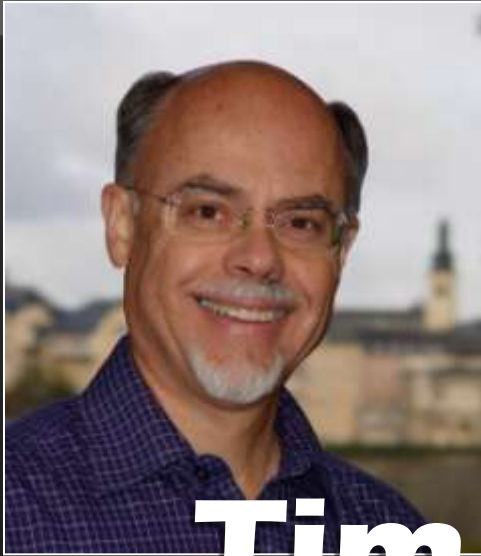
- Insist on the difference between **creedalism** and the usefulness of statements of faith in the catechetical process. Creedalistic groups tend to establish a church hierarchy to enforce a formalized cluster of beliefs upon the conscience of their members and appeal to confessions of faith—not to the Bible—for their identity.

Implementing a new church's theological stance

- Always prove your position from Scripture rather than from the doctrinal statement and train your leadership to do the same.
- Emphasize memorizing Scripture more than memorizing a statement of faith or a catechism;
- Be prepared to improve, clarify or correct any statement of faith in light of new controversy or more research.

I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day. Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.”

2 Timothy 1:12b-14 NKJV



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